USING THE „MOUNTAIN" METAPHOR TO INCREASE SELF-EFFICACY

Ileana L. Vitalia *

*University of Piteşti, Department of Psychology and Communication Sciences
E-mail: ileanavitalia@yahoo.com

Abstract
A new growing body of studies have suggested that therapists and counsellors should consider nature involvement and nature connectedness when assessing clients and planning therapy strategies. Strategies and techniques incorporating nature analogies (as in the form of metaphors) and embedding clients' experiences ''in a larger natural story of life'' can support clients through the different stages of change. Similar to climbing a mountain, the process of change is not a simple task, it involves certain steps and a permanent connection to personal resources, feelings and thoughts.
The aim of this study was to evaluate the efficiency of working with the metaphor of a mountain on self-efficiency in students. We supposed that this kind of exercise would facilitate the access to personal resources and needs and it would facilitate the increase of self-efficiency. We used an experimental design, observation, psychodiagnostic instruments (Self-Efficacy Scale - SAS), and statistical methods (Paired-Samples T Test).After the participation in this type of metaphorical exercise the participants were more aware of their present needs and resources, and experienced a higher level of self-efficiency. They felt more capable to mobilize their cognitive, behavioural and motivational resources to successfully complete their goals.

Keywords: stages of change, metaphor, climbing to a mountain peak

1. INTRODUCTION
Many recent studies established a strong link among nature, contact with nature and enhanced human wellness, and the potential benefits of nature experiences on enhancing mental health (Greenleaf, Bryant, Pollock, 2014; Haluza, Schönbauer, Cervinka, 2014; Howell, Passmore, Buro, 2013; Răban-Motounu, 2015; Vitalia, 2012). Moreover, there is growing recognition for a greater inclusion of nature-based approaches into professional practice in the form of ecotherapy or ecopsychology (Greenleaf, Bryant, Pollock, 2014) or in the form of creative - experiential techniques. These techniques involve working in non-verbal and non-cognitive ways and incorporate the use of alternative universal languages, especially those of creative expression (Unification Psychotherapy, Mitrofan, 2012). Strategies and techniques incorporating nature analogies (as in the form of metaphors) and embedding clients' experiences ''in a larger natural story of life'' can support clients through the different stages of change. The process of change is a dynamic and non linear process, involving considerable movement in all direction, and the importance of effort, commitment and motivation from the clients. An increasing number of recent studies have begun to adopt a "stages of change" approach, in which investigators describe a series of inter-related stages which they hypothesize together constitute an overall process of development, growth or recovery. These studies are based on the theoretical and empirical ideas about stages of development and their associated tasks (Davidson et al., 2010). Within the broader behavioral health field, one stage of change model has become increasingly influential over the last decade: the Transtheoretical Model initially described in the work of Prochaska & DiClemente

and Prochaska, DiClemente &Norcross (Amundson, 2005). This model emerged from research on addiction and it was adapted and applied to various contexts from career counseling to the process of mental health recovery (Davidson et al., 2010). As described by different authors (Amundson, 2005; Davidson et al., 2010), according to this theory, health related change efforts involve a series of steps through which people pass as they make significant progress in altering patterns of behavior. Stages include pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance. In a metaphorical language this process is similar to climbing a mountain (this metaphor is called Recovery Mountain).

In "pre-contemplation, the first stage of this dynamic process, the individual is not yet considering (has not even yet begun to think about) change. The process evolves to a stage of, contemplation", in which the person begins to consider the possibility of change and to evaluate the pros and cons associated with such efforts. The person then moves on to "preparation" and begins planning to make changes to which he or she is truly committed. After the planning stage, the person then goes on to take "action" and makes specific changes to end unhealthy behaviors and/or increase health-engendering behaviors. When the action stage is successful, a person may enter the fifth and final stage of change, termed "maintenance," in which the person works to sustain the positive behavioral change over the longer term (Davidson et al., 2010, p.214).

The efficiency of this approach is increased when it is combined with the power of metaphorical techniques. Because of the delicate yet direct nature of metaphorical language, the client is constantly provoked to connect to personal resources, feelings and thoughts through each stage of change. As a result, the entire process of change is facilitated and the person may progress toward maintenance of healthy behaviors.

Given the efficiency of creative experiential symbolic and metaphoric techniques (Vitalia and Raban-Motounu, 2013), we adapted and applied this model in the form of a metaphor named The Mountain Metaphor in the field of personal development and optimization. This metaphor was applied as a part of an experiential program based on holistic and systemic perspective that integrated experiential and career techniques to increase emotional stability, self-esteem, self-efficiency, and self acceptance in students (Vitalia, 2012). ,,The Mountain" metaphor facilitated the awareness of personal and career issues, such as uncertainty and the need for exterior support for clearer and more adequate decisions, negative self-image, low ability to plan, organize, and goal accomplishment.

Objectives: General objective: to evaluate the efficiency of using a metaphoric technique based on change models - The Mountain Metaphor. Practical objectives:
- To increase the level of self-efficacy
- To increase the awareness of personal resources and needs.

Hypotheses: We suppose that working in an experiential manner with a metaphoric technique - The Mountain Metaphor - would facilitate an increased level of self-efficacy on a group of students.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Method: In this study we used an experimental design. The variables of this research were: the level of self-efficacy and awareness of personal resources and needs (dependent variables), and the Mountain metaphor (independent variable).

Self-efficacy was described as a person's belief about his or her capabilities to perform an activity that has influence over events affecting his or her life. Self-efficacy influences motivation by determining the goals people set, how much effort they invest in achieving those goals, and their resilience when faced with difficulties or failure (Dixon, Thornton and Young, 2007).

Psychometrical methods: *Self-Efficacy Scale - SAS* and Statistical methods.

Instruments: *Self-Efficacy Scale - SAS* is a short 10 item questionnaire assessing the level of self-Efficacy. In contrast to other scales that were designed to assess optimism, this one explicitly refers to personal agency, i.e., the belief that one's actions are responsible for successful outcomes. Perceived

self-efficacy is more a prospective and operative construct rather than a general one. The scale was adapted on Romanian population and it has good psychometrical values.

Participants: 24 students were involved in this research. The participants were randomly selected. All participants were first grade students, in the Socio-Humanistic Faculty. The experiment was conducted in the laboratory of psychotherapy, in a comfortable environment, with adequate conditions of light and temperature. The laboratory had enough space to allow movement and chairs to sit on. Assessments of the mentioned variables were conducted before and after working with the metaphor.

Procedure: First, the students completed the Self-Efficacy Scale. Then, they were asked to select a recent difficulty they encountered in their life and they couldn't overcome. After a few moments, all the students were asked to sit comfortably with legs and arms uncrossed. The researcher then asked them to pay attention to their breathing for about a minute and to let their body slowly relax as they breathe in and out. Once their body relaxed, the students were guided to imagine a mountain appearing in front of them. As the image of the mountain clarified, the students were provoked to move closer to it and to visually explore it paying attention to the shape, the altitude, the colors, the smells, the sounds, and being aware of their needs, sensations, emotions and thoughts. After a few minutes of exploration, the group participants were asked to move on and to begin the preparation for the journey on the mountain (to select a proper itinerary according to their present needs, and to take with them all the necessary resources). Next, they were guided to take the first steps on the mountain, paying attention to the specific landscape, and to the characteristics of their path (the shape, the texture, the position on the mountain). They may encounter different kind of obstacles on their road. Again, the members of the group were asked to become aware of their emotions, thoughts, and needs facing of these obstacles. They are guided to select the most useful resources and strategies to cope with these difficulties. As the journey continued, the participants could take a few moments to rest and to prepare for climbing to the mountain peak. Slowly, students were asked to observe the changes of the landscape around them, and the shape of their path. The peak became closer and clearer each step so the participants were provoked to continue the ascension. When they reached the top of the mountain, they were asked to be aware of their present sensations, emotions and thoughts, to explore this experience and to connect to their deepest resources. After a few minutes of personal silent exploration, the participants were guided to come back on the place the journey started. The researcher invited the participants to draw their mountain experience using colored pencils. Then, in small groups of three, each person was invited to describe this experience.

In the end, all the subjects filled in the instrument.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Statistical analysis was used to confirm the hypothesis of this study. Student t test (SPSS 17.00) was computed to compare test results.

Table1. Group Statistics

	Experimental group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-Efficacy	before	24	31,38	2,55
	after	24	34	3,31

Paired-Samples t Test was used to test the significance of the differences before and after working with the Mountain metaphor. Descriptive Statistics were also performed.

There were significant differences regarding the level of self-efficacy after working with the Mountain Metaphor when compared with the initial situation (t=−5,146 p<0,01).

Statistical analysis has confirmed the hypothesis of this study and it has demonstrated that using the Mountain metaphoric technique in a group of students was an efficient method to increase the level of self-efficacy. The participants became more confident and optimistic about their capabilities to perform an activity that has influence over events affecting their life. Moreover, they felt more capable to mobilize their cognitive, behavioral and motivational resources to successfully complete their goals and

to cope with difficulties or failure. The stage structure of the metaphor enabled the group participants to create new ways of viewing their situation and opened up the possibilities of new coping strategies in every stage of their experience. By using The Mountain metaphor, the participants created some new understanding of their world at the present time; and with that come a new perceptual framework with regard to possible solutions to the challenges they now face.

4. CONCLUSIONS

A metaphoric technique – The mountain metaphor- based on stage model, proved to be an efficient method to increase self-efficacy because it can facilitate the access to personal coping mechanism as well as to personal resources. These results are supported by other studies conceiving the metaphor as a tool of innovation and creation and exploring its efficacy further within the community and the clinical practice (Brown, 2006; Davidson et al., 2010; Southall, 2012).

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